

Protecting the Bay Area's Aviation Resources

The Land-Use Connection



Association
of Bay Area
Governments

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SAN FRANCISCO BAY
CONSERVATION
AND
DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



Regional Airport Planning Committee
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Introduction

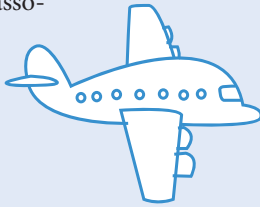
Appropriate land-use planning around airports is a shared responsibility involving local governments, county airport land use commissions and the public. This brochure is intended to serve as a resource for the general public and elected officials who will be addressing future land-use proposals near airports.

The Bay Area is home to some 23 airports that serve commercial and general aviation users. This regional airport system forms an integral part of the Bay Area's transportation network by providing links to communities throughout the United States and abroad. Because of the growing demand for aviation services in the Bay Area and difficulties encountered with past airport improvement plans, it is essential that the capacity of existing airports be preserved. Bay Area communities, faced with accelerating housing and economic needs, are increasingly having to make difficult decisions concerning the amount and type of new development to allow in and near airport flight corridors. Development that is not compatible with aviation activity, due to noise or safety factors, may strain airport and community relations as well as create long-term operational problems for the airport. Thus, land-use decisions by local governments have become inextricably linked with the future of aviation in the Bay Area.

This brochure has been prepared by the Regional Airport Planning Committee, an advisory committee to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and Association of Bay Area Governments. The Committee is charged with addressing the long-term aviation needs of the Bay Area as well as regional environmental issues associated with serving projected aviation demand.

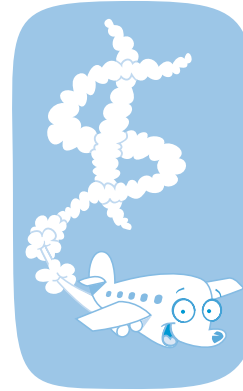
An expanded version of this brochure can be found on MTC's Web site at:

www.mtc.gov/planning/air_plan/



Why Airports Are Important to the Bay Area

- Nearly 470,000 jobs in the Bay Area — or about one in seven jobs — is tied to aviation, and airports are the major employers in several Bay Area counties
- Airport-related revenues add \$37 billion annually to the Bay Area economy
- Airline service connects the Bay Area to over 70 domestic and 30 international cities
- Twenty general aviation airports handle over half the aircraft flights in Bay Area and provide an alternative to the airlines for business and recreational travel
- The three commercial airports are vital to the freight industry, handling \$46 billion in air cargo annually
- General aviation airports are used by police, fire, medical and other services that protect people and property
- Taxes on aviation help support local governments and schools
- General aviation airports protect open space, and land near airports is often used by communities for recreation and other community services



Consequences of Not Protecting Airports

Past experience in the Bay Area and elsewhere shows that building a new airport or improving the capacity of existing runways is a long and resource-intensive process, with unpredictable outcomes. Individually, a single local land-use decision may have only a negligible impact on an airport, but the cumulative effect of a series of poor land-use decisions over time could lead to increased public pressure to restrict airport activity or even close the airport (as has been suggested for several smaller airports in the Bay Area). Good land-use compatibility around airports is the chief means available today to protect the future capability of the Bay Area's existing airports.

Although closure of any of the region's large commercial airports is unlikely, the potential addition of new residents or tall structures near these airports is a continuing concern. More at risk are the region's general aviation airports which perform the bulk of the work in handling smaller aircraft that would otherwise tie up operations at the larger commercial airports, resulting in prolonged and frequent flight delays. Closure of any airport could have a domino effect, as the aircraft and their flight operations are relocated to airports in other communities that may not have planned for their presence or may not have appropriate land-use controls in place for the increased level of activity.

Key Questions to Ask When Evaluating New Land-Use Proposals Around Airports

Maintaining good land-use compatibility in the airport environs requires that three critical areas be addressed — protecting people near the airport from excessive noise, protecting people on the ground from crash hazards, and protecting people in the air from tall structures and other navigational hazards. Local decisionmakers and the public should consider the following basic questions when evaluating new land-use proposals near airports:

Airport Noise

- Is the proposed land use considered noise "sensitive" (e.g., residential, schools, hospitals, libraries, etc.)?
- What are the existing and expected future airport noise levels?
- Is the development in an area where noise levels would exceed the California airport noise standard (65 CNEL, or community noise equivalent level)? How many new people would be exposed to excessive airport noise?
- If not in an area that exceeds state noise standards, is the development under one of the airport's major takeoff and departure routes?

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Protecting People on the Ground from Crash Hazards

- Is the development in a defined “safety zone” for the airport’s runways?
- If not in a defined safety zone, is the proposed development under the flight path of aircraft approaching or departing the airport?
- How many people will be located in the proposed development, and what will the intensity of use be (i.e., will large numbers of people be concentrated in a small area)?

Protecting People in the Air

- What is the height of the proposed building or structure in relation to established Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) height limitations around the airport?
- If required under federal aviation regulations, has the developer submitted the necessary project notification form to the FAA and received a “determination of no hazard”?

Other Land-Use Considerations

- Does the development have the potential to attract birds that would create a hazard to aircraft, or produce unusual lighting that could distract pilots?

The Final Decision

Airport land use commissions (ALUCs) have developed land-use compatibility plans for all of the Bay Area airports, but it is up to local jurisdictions to implement and enforce these recommendations through their general and specific plans, zoning regulations, development approval conditions, real estate disclosure notices, etc. Under state law, local jurisdictions may override an ALUC plan recommendation with a 2/3 vote, but in doing so they must document facts supporting the override decision and inform both the Caltrans’ Division of Aeronautics and the local ALUC of their findings. Local jurisdictions should also be cognizant of potential liability issues in overriding ALUC plan recommendations.

Where to Go for More Information

Airport land-use decisions are rarely black or white, but fortunately there is abundant guidance on this topic and a number of places local planners and the public can go for more information. The most comprehensive compendium of information on airport land-use compatibility issues is the *Airport Land Use Planning Handbook* prepared by Caltrans’ Division of Aeronautics. There are also many other individuals and agencies with expertise in this area, including the county airport land-use commissions, airports, FAA, Caltrans and the Regional Airport Planning Committee. MTC’s Web site (listed in the Introduction) provides extensive contact information.

Conclusion

By preparing this brochure, the Regional Airport Planning Committee hopes that local government leaders and the public will review their local plans for consistency with ALUC plans, and, when presented with new development proposals near airports, make informed decisions that will serve both the aviation community and local community well in the future.



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